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Chairman: Mr. KUKAN (Slovakia)

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AGENDA ITEM 113: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 113: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (A/48/12 and Add.1, A/48/64, A/48/91, A/48/134, A/48/181, A/48/184, A/48/207, A/48/294-S/26247, A/48/299-S/26261, A/48/308-S/26295, A/48/391 and A/48/444)

1. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), presenting her report (A/48/12 and Add.1), said that, during the previous year, the Office of the United High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had had to respond to new and ongoing emergency situations, while pursuing opportunities for solutions, frequently in conditions of instability and uncertainty. At the same time, it had been seeking to develop new approaches which could help to prevent the conditions that produced refugee flows.

2. Twenty years previously, there had been 2.5 million refugees in the world; the total was now close to 19 million. In addition, an estimated 24 million people had been displaced within their own countries. In the current period of transition and upheaval in world affairs, large-scale movements of refugees were likely to continue.

3. Africa continued to be one of the most seriously affected regions: some 30 per cent of the world's refugees were to be found on that continent. As much as one tenth of the population of Somalia was outside its borders and relied on international assistance for survival. Over half a million Liberians were in a similar situation. Meanwhile, new crises continued to emerge. Earlier in the year, more than 280,000 people had fled from Togo into Benin and Ghana.

4. More recently, close to 700,000 refugees had poured into Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zaire, following the overthrow of the Government of Burundi. UNHCR, working closely with other United Nations agencies and organizations as well as with non-governmental organizations, had dispatched an emergency team together with food, medicine and shelter materials. The onset of the seasonal rains had made the provision of proper shelter an urgent need for refugees, who currently lived in makeshift encampments. UNHCR had just launched an appeal for $17 million to cover emergency requirements for three months. Donor Governments had also been asked to provide aircraft to transport large quantities of the necessary relief items.

5. But Africa had no monopoly on refugee problems. Nearly 4 million people currently depended on international assistance as a result of the brutal war in the former Yugoslavia. Conflicts in Transcaucasia and Central Asia had already produced hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons. If unresolved, those conflicts might have far-reaching consequences for international security. Those and other crises had taxed the capacity of her Office to the limit.

6. Notwithstanding, some of the conflicts and tensions which had generated massive outflows of refugees had been resolved or had subsided, opening up new possibilities - even if often fragile ones - for voluntary repatriation. About 2.4 million refugees had returned home in 1992, and hundreds of thousands more

(Mrs. Ogata)

had done so in 1993. The last Cambodian refugee camp in Thailand had been closed in April. Currently, over 2.5 million Afghan refugees had returned home, 1.9 million of them with the assistance of UNHCR. Following the visits of the High Commissioner to Bangladesh and Myanmar, there had been considerable progress in the dialogue between the two Governments and UNHCR. The Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia and Oceania was shortly to sign a memorandum of understanding which might lead to the return of the quarter of a million refugees from Myanmar who were currently in Bangladesh. Meanwhile, the return of 1.3 million Mozambican refugees - the largest repatriation operation ever attempted in Africa - had got under way in July. Even in Somalia and Liberia, momentum towards repatriation was increasing as a modicum of stability returned to areas of those war-ravaged lands. Nevertheless, continued vigilance was required to ensure that repatriation was voluntary and that it provided a truly humanitarian solution to the refugee problem.

7. The causes of contemporary refugee movements included individual persecution, widespread violations of human rights, and conflict. They were often compounded by severe economic problems which exacerbated social frictions. Furthermore, alongside refugees and victims of conflicts, large numbers of people were emigrating in search of economic betterment. The continuing increase in the unregulated movement of people throughout the world had imposed a serious strain on the tradition of asylum as overburdened countries of refuge increasingly chafed under their heavy burdens. It was in that context that UNHCR must ensure that refugees continued to be granted asylum and protection. The success of its efforts would depend in large measure on the capacity of the Office to respond effectively to emergencies, to bring about stable solutions, and to forge strategic partnerships in order to forestall refugee outflows.

8. The need for a close relationship between the humanitarian and the political in responding to crises was evident. In a number of recent emergencies, humanitarian efforts had been deployed within a framework of broader peace-keeping and peacemaking initiatives. Nowhere had the complexity of those joint efforts been more evident than in the former Yugoslavia. There, in close cooperation with other United Nations agencies and organizations, UNHCR had attempted, through its field presence, to ensure the delivery of humanitarian relief and to provide protection. Operating in the midst of conflict, it had witnessed the limits of humanitarian action, particularly in the absence of a political breakthrough. It had even experienced the danger that humanitarian action might cease to be perceived as neutral by parties to a conflict and become vulnerable to attack and manipulation.

9. The staff of UNHCR had often faced great personal danger in conflict situations around the world and, on occasion, had lost their lives. She had condemned such crimes while strengthening arrangements for ensuring staff security, in particular through the creation of a Field Safety Coordination Unit and the setting up of security-training programmes for UNHCR staff.

10. An effective response to emergencies was also dependent on the cooperation of a broad range of partners. More particularly, UNHCR attached great value to the role that the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs could play in that field. For its part, her Office had established collaborative relationships with a number of agencies, including the Danish and Norwegian

(Mrs. Ogata)

Refugee Councils, the Swedish Rescue Board and the United Nations Volunteers. Collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) had also reached new levels. The diversification and reinforcement of such partnerships were an essential element of the strategy of UNHCR.

11. The pursuit of solutions also required cooperative approaches. Repatriation operations had brought home the fact that, for repatriation to be a truly viable and humanitarian solution, it needed to be underpinned by efforts to create a political and economic environment conducive to reintegration, reconciliation and recovery. An investment in economic reconstruction might well be the best possible means of consolidating a political settlement. Only through a concerted and holistic approach could the obstacles to effective reintegration be overcome. UNHCR was therefore promoting stronger links with development agencies, such as regional development banks.

12. In the recent operation in Cambodia, UNHCR had participated in an integrated approach to restore peace to a society torn by decades of war; an overall political framework together with a clear division of responsibilities had facilitated the pursuit of common objectives. The solution to the refugee problem in Cambodia was intimately bound up with broader efforts to promote human rights, build institutions and organize elections. Conversely, humanitarian initiatives to reintegrate refugees and meet the needs of internally displaced persons were one of the important building blocks in the process of national reconciliation.

13. In speaking of partnership in the pursuit of solutions, she wished to say a word about the situation in Central America and the conclusion of the process initiated by the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) after five years of concerted efforts. Returnees now outnumbered refugees in Central America. Repatriation of the last sizeable refugee population in the region - the 50,000 Guatemalan refugees in Mexico - had begun in January 1993. With the repatriation and initial reintegration phase of CIREFCA largely completed, UNHCR had handed over its lead agency role to UNDP, although it would maintain an active presence in the region.

14. The initiative of CIREFCA had been a remarkable one, bringing together the peace process, humanitarian action and development efforts. CIREFCA had maintained its collaboration with Governments, UNHCR, UNDP and numerous non-governmental organizations. In its pioneering of quick-impact projects, it had helped to bridge the gap between immediate reintegration needs and long-term development. That formative experience could be applied to other regions. Nevertheless, the peace process remained fragile and incomplete in parts of the region. The consolidation of solutions required the continued commitment of the international community.

15. For its part, prevention was the best "solution" to the refugee problem. Preventive activity could pre-empt the development of conditions which caused people to flee, or at least play a limiting role by making available protection and relief before people were forced to emigrate. It was a multifaceted undertaking which required the promotion of human rights, economic development, conflict resolution, institution-building and the dissemination of information. UNHCR had become increasingly involved in preventive efforts, including

(Mrs. Ogata)

humanitarian assistance, information-gathering, the training of officials, institution-building and the dissemination of information. Where conflict had already erupted, UNHCR was ready to cooperate in attempts to contain and reverse the conditions that had led to refugee flows.

16. UNHCR attached particular importance to the strengthening of the capacity of the United Nations system to address the problems of internally displaced persons and was willing to play a coordinating role, if called upon, when internal displacement bore a direct relationship to refugee flows and returnee movements. Nevertheless, the role of UNHCR in the area of prevention remained primarily catalytic and could only bear fruit in collaboration with other partners. Experience in the former Soviet Union, notably in Tajikistan, had clearly demonstrated that preventive action must take place within the framework of broader international efforts to address the causes of conflict, safeguard human rights and promote development. The integration of efforts should not, however, blur crucial distinctions between the mandates of the different organizations.

17. She wished to stress the importance of reinforcing collaboration with non-governmental organizations, which played a crucial role at every stage of a refugee situation. UNHCR had recently set in motion a process of regional consultations with non-governmental organizations, which would culminate in a global conference to be held at Oslo in June 1994.

18. Partnership would not be complete without the support of Governments. UNHCR needed vigorous political backing in the promotion of solutions, as well as generous financial support for its humanitarian programmes. Without the support of Governments, all the other relationships which her Office sought to forge would lack a solid foundation.

19. It was only by reinforcing linkages that the international community could properly address the refugee situations of today and forestall those of tomorrow. But true partnership not only entailed the development of linkages and the integration of efforts; it must also be built on recognition of the specificity of each of the actors and the need to maximize their comparative advantages. Any other approach would be detrimental both to the efficiency of joint operations and to the fundamental mandate of UNHCR: to protect refugees.

20. Mr. VAN DE CRAEN (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Economic Community and its member States, said that 1993 had been one of the most difficult years for UNHCR; the number of refugees throughout the world had increased to 19 million and the number of internally displaced persons had risen to 24 million, thus exceeding the number of refugees.

21. The year 1993 had also been marked by the increasingly wanton violation of the most elemental principles of international humanitarian law and human rights, the growing insecurity that characterized the working conditions of UNHCR staff and volunteers in the field, difficulties in obtaining access to affected populations, and the manipulation of humanitarian efforts by the parties to conflicts in order to achieve their political objectives.

(Mr. van de Craen, Belgium)

22. The Community and its member States formally condemned those violations and reiterated the obligation of all parties to conflicts to respect international humanitarian law and the right of victims to have unconditional access to humanitarian assistance. During the recent International Conference for the Protection of War Victims, held at Geneva, the participants had reaffirmed their obligation to respect those important principles.

23. In Europe one of the main concerns of the European Community was the continued fighting and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in the United Nations Protected Areas in Croatia. The European Community vigorously condemned such acts of cruelty as continued ethnic cleansing, forcible displacement, the deliberate policy of starvation and the tragic fate of women and children, the principal victims of the conflict, all of which were war crimes and blatant and unacceptable violations of human rights which must cease immediately.

24. The European Community paid tribute to the significant work undertaken by UNHCR in the former Yugoslavia and to the courage displayed by its staff and volunteers in the field. The Community condemned attacks against humanitarian personnel and called upon all parties to guarantee their safety.

25. The European Community and its member States, which were the principal contributors to UNPROFOR, had, since the beginning of the conflict in 1991, allocated $945 million for relief operations in the former Yugoslavia, which amounted to 65 per cent of the total amount of such contributions. The Community assured UNHCR of its continued support and reiterated its wish to continue to participate in the formulation of the strategy for humanitarian activities. In addition, more than 320,000 refugees from the former Yugoslavia had been received temporarily by the member States of the European Community.

26. The conflicts in other parts of Europe, particularly in the Caucasus, gave rise to serious concern in view of their implications for regional peace and stability and their humanitarian repercussions in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. He stressed the enormity of the problem of refugees and displaced persons in Africa caused by ethnic conflicts. Africa contained one third of the total number of refugees, which amounted to a crushing burden for countries whose economic situation was somewhat precarious.

27. With respect to Somalia, he noted that the supply of food had improved, and that the focus remained on humanitarian and political objectives. Concerning Angola, the European Community and its members States were ready to provide humanitarian assistance in response to the United Nations appeal, and called upon the parties to the conflict to refrain from any step that might impede the provision of relief to the population. The Community also called upon all the parties to the conflict in the Sudan to respect freedom of access and allow the normal functioning of humanitarian operations in the region. The European Community vigorously condemned the coup d'état in Burundi and expressed its concern at the resulting instability, which was compelling the population to seek refuge in neighbouring countries.

(Mr. van de Craen, Belgium)

28. In 1993 there had been encouraging signs in terms of repatriation. Repatriation could only be carried out satisfactorily if the country of origin fully respected human rights and fundamental freedoms, accepted its responsibility for the welfare of its own citizens and allowed returnees to integrate fully into society. The European Community and its member States welcomed the UNHCR initiative on the definition of principles governing repatriation. Further, they invited the international community and the United Nations specialized agencies to pool their endeavours to promote reconstruction and rehabilitation.

29. He noted the success achieved in the Cambodian refugee repatriation programme carried out under the auspices of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia in implementation of the global plan of action for Indochina. He also expressed the hope that the local situation would permit the continuation of repatriation programmes for Afghans and Tajiks. With reference to the repatriation of Rohinga refugees in Myanmar, he asked the Government of that country to permit early implementation of the agreements concluded on the matter.

30. The European Community and its member States welcomed the signing by South Africa of an agreement with UNHCR whereby the latter would provide assistance to refugees in South Africa, as well as the agreements concluded in some African countries on voluntary repatriation. In Latin America refugees would still need the special assistance that the European Community and its member States were ready to provide them in close cooperation with UNHCR.

31. Regarding the UNHCR budget, he noted the need for a more equitable distribution of the burden and invited States to demonstrate their solidarity by participating in the funding of programmes or by increasing their contributions. Cooperation with other agencies of the United Nations system should be increased.

32. The European Community and its member States granted asylum and protection to persons persecuted on the grounds indicated in the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees. Nevertheless, the vast majority of asylum seekers were not refugees under the terms of the Convention. The member countries of the European Community had adopted the 1990 Dublin Convention, establishing procedures for the processing of applications for asylum to avoid futile duplication. Further, with a view to harmonizing asylum policies, in 1982 the competent ministers had adopted, in London, two resolutions, one on requests for asylum that were patently groundless and one on third receiving countries. There was a need to distinguish, with all due caution, between economic immigrants and genuine asylum seekers. The member States of the European Community would increase their cooperation in that area within the framework of the Treaty on European Union, which had just come into force.

33. In conclusion, he noted that the integrity and neutrality of UNHCR had at times been threatened and stated that the European Community and its member States commended the courage and determination displayed by UNHCR staff in overcoming difficult situations.

34. Ms. MANSARAY (Sierra Leone) said that her delegation had noted the strategy of UNHCR described in the report. Voluntary repatriation should remain the preferred long-term solution.

35. After noting the need for methods to ensure a quick response to emergency situations, and for coordination between organizations, donor countries and non-governmental organizations, her delegation called for a link between peace-keeping operations and humanitarian assistance.

36. The civil war in Liberia continued to pose serious refugee problems for Sierra Leone. The country faced tremendous social and economic deprivation as the war had destroyed crops, industry and infrastructure in general. Measures had been adopted, such as the setting up of a national rehabilitation committee, to allow refugees and displaced persons to return home as soon as peace was restored, but her Government would have to seek assistance to cope with the problem, which amounted to an intolerable burden on its economy.

37. Sierra Leone basically saw the question of refugees as a humanitarian problem. Her Government had opened educational establishments to refugees, provided them with passports and promoted their integration.

38. Out of both valid and invalid concern for the security issues raised by mass movements of people, some receiving States had responded with tighter asylum and immigration policies, and had reacted with fear, racism and xenophobia. In the view of her delegation, until the international community could overcome the scourge of poverty the problem of refugees would remain, no matter what help was provided to mitigate it.

39. In conclusion, her delegation supported the appeal made by the High Commissioner for increased contributions to that great humanitarian effort and welcomed the implementation of integrated agricultural projects for refugees.

40. Mr. MARRERO (United States of America) said that UNHCR was facing serious challenges in the former Yugoslavia, Africa and the former Soviet Union and its important achievements in the areas of management reform, emergency response capacity-building and meeting the needs of refugee women and children were to be commended.

41. Caring for refugees involved prevention, assistance and development. Assistance was the aspect of the refugee continuum in which UNHCR was primarily involved, although it had to give increasing attention to prevention.

42. The United States believed that UNHCR should assume certain responsibilities regarding internally displaced persons on a case-by-case basis in response to specific requests from the Secretary-General or the relevant organs of the United Nations, and it welcomed the High Commissioner's decision that such responsibilities should be limited. In the case of the displaced persons in Bosnia, even though many lives had been saved thanks to UNHCR, the United States did not agree that the Office should have a broader role which would stretch its capacities and might damage its efforts to ensure protection for refugees elsewhere in the world.

(Mr. Marrero, United States)

43. The United Nations system should strengthen its capacity to combat human rights violators, and cooperation between UNHCR and human rights organizations as a means of preventing refugee flows should be encouraged.

44. With respect to the cooperation between UNHCR and a number of United Nations organizations, the United States Government commended the staff of UNHCR and the World Food Programme for their commitment to improving their cooperation as a model for others. It also welcomed the use of United Nations Volunteers in UNHCR activities. It urged UNHCR and UNICEF to cooperate in order to cater better to the needs of refugee children and hoped that the leaders of the organizations of the United Nations system would promote cooperation to reduce inefficiency in relief programmes.

45. The refugee continuum did not conclude until the repatriated refugees had been satisfactorily reintegrated in their countries of origin; in that regard UNHCR and UNDP had cooperated effectively in Central America and Cambodia. The United States hoped that UNDP would use the tools of development and technical cooperation in the transition from refugee reintegration to national reconstruction.

46. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs was the office responsible for coordination within the United Nations system. The United States urged UNHCR and the Department to continue their close cooperation to improve the response of the United Nations to complex humanitarian emergencies. Close collaboration between the humanitarian, political and peacemaking arms of the United Nations was also essential.

47. The United States particularly commended the progress made by UNHCR in coping with the needs of refugee women and children in its programmes. Other United Nations humanitarian organizations involved in refugee assistance programmes should follow the Office's lead and try to target programmes on refugee women and children. The United States was concerned about the security situation in and around the Somali refugee camps in north-east Kenya where 192 instances of rape had been recorded between February and August 1993. The United States was supporting the Office's efforts to assist the rape victims and prevent further incidents through a special contribution of US$ 250,000.

48. In the Executive Committee the High Commissioner had reported her serious concern about the funding of the General Programmes, which benefited 30 million refugees throughout the world. The United States intended to announce a significant pledge to the 1994 General Programmes at the next pledging conference and it urged other donors to follow its example.

49. Mr. KÄÄRIÄ (Finland) said that UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies had been working under strong pressure in the post-cold-war conflicts. Finland commended UNHCR for its innovative and dynamic approach to the new types of complex situation. However, humanitarian action had to be accompanied by parallel measures of peacemaking and post-conflict political, economic and social rehabilitation. That involved strengthening the global and regional institutions and building bridges between political, humanitarian and development activities without compromising the neutrality of the humanitarian work. In the United Nations system there was now a particular need to optimize

(Mr. Kääriä, Finland)

the benefits of the existing coordination machinery by giving adequate attention to the interconnectedness of all the elements of the humanitarian continuum from early warning to relief and development.

50. Finland remained committed to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. However, the continuing misuse of the right of asylum was seriously jeopardizing the institution of asylum. In 1993 the cost of maintaining persons granted asylum had been 10 times the UNHCR budget. All countries and international organizations, especially UNHCR, must redouble their efforts to combat the increasing misuse of the right of asylum.

51. Finland endorsed the basic criteria adopted by the Executive Committee as guidelines for the Office's increasing involvement with displaced persons. It also endorsed the opinion of the High Commissioner that the activities in that area should be aimed not only at the provision of immediate relief but also at prevention and the search for solutions. Since the magnitude of the problem exceeded the Office's resources, it should concern itself with displaced persons only in response to a specific request by the Secretary-General and should bear in mind the mandates and expertise of other relevant organizations.

52. One of the most effective ways of tackling the problem of the constantly growing number of refugees and displaced persons was to concentrate on early and effective prevention of situations which might generate refugee flows. It was necessary to address the root causes, prevent political conflicts, increase capacity by means of training and institution-building, and carry out mass information campaigns. In political and aid-related matters UNHCR should act only as a catalyst. It was giving increasing attention to prevention, but early warning was an essential element which preceded prevention. An early warning system should be established as outlined in the Secretary-General's report "An Agenda for Peace".

53. The prevailing view was that many of the crisis situations of the future were likely to arise in Eastern Europe and in the new States of the former Soviet Union, where millions of persons were already on the move. UNHCR must give more attention to preventive action in those regions and strengthen its presence in the new States. In addition, the relevant United Nations and other international organizations, in conjunction with the national authorities, must devise a comprehensive humanitarian strategy for the States of the former Soviet Union.

54. Finland commended UNHCR for its continued efforts to enhance its efficiency despite the increasing pressure from unprecedented humanitarian challenges. It urged UNHCR to continue its work in the spirit of "doing more with less", as discussed in the Subcommittee on Administrative and Financial Matters. That strategy was particularly important in the current situation where UNHCR could no longer expect considerable increases in the contributions of its traditional donors. At the same time, UNHCR must redouble its efforts to identify new sources of funding. Finland, for its part, despite its current economic difficulties, had made special efforts to continue its support to UNHCR as the major channel for its assistance to refugees.

(Mr. Kääriä, Finland)

55. The relief provided by the international community to the people of the former Yugoslavia, devastated by tragic events, had proved insufficient, in particular because of the unacceptable obstacles placed in the way of the relief effort by the parties to the conflict. An immediate political solution would be the only way to prevent a worse catastrophe and permit the gradual return of millions of refugees and displaced persons and a start on the reconstruction of the area.

56. The situation in the Horn of Africa remained fragile, although in some parts of the region it was already possible to move from relief to rehabilitation. It would, however, require close cooperation between the humanitarian and development organizations. The rapidly worsening situation in Angola demanded urgent political and humanitarian measures in order to save Africa from another large-scale tragedy. Nevertheless, the successful completion or gradual phasing out of assistance in some major operations, such as those in Cambodia and Central America, proved that, if everyone worked together, progress could be achieved and conditions for peace and development restored.

57. Mr. MZUMACHARO (Malawi) said that his country, which was land-locked, was bordered on three sides by the Republic of Mozambique; hence the importance of the question of Mozambican refugees in Malawi. According to the report of the High Commissioner, in December 1992, there were 1 million Mozambican refugees and at one time in the biennium 1991-1992 the figure was close to a million and a half. Since not all the refugees were counted, the real figures were much higher.

58. Traditionally, Malawi's most cost-effective access to the sea had been through the Mozambican ports of Beira and Nacala. During more than 16 years of war in Mozambique, Malawi had been involved in peace-keeping activities to protect the Nacala corridor and paid heavily to transport its imports and exports by other routes. His Government had therefore encouraged dialogue and had welcomed the signing of the Peace Agreement between the Government of Mozambique and the Resistencia Nacional Mozambicana (RENAMO) in Rome in 1992. It was glad that the peace accord had been respected since then, thereby increasing the prospect of a durable solution to the Mozambican refugee problem. It was Malawi's understanding that, between 1992 and 1993, UNHCR had engaged in negotiations with the parties concerned and had begun general preparations to facilitate voluntary repatriation. It was important that those efforts should be complemented by well-prepared plans. It would be necessary to resettle the returnees in areas free of land mines and to distribute food in places of settlement inside Mozambique. In some cases, it was not a question of real repatriation, since there were people who crossed and recrossed the border at will.

59. The Minister of Trade and Industry of Malawi had pointed out that the cost of taking in more than 1 million refugees had reached a critical level. It involved the displacement of Malawians from agricultural land, overgrazing, deforestation and environmental degradation, and put tremendous pressure on the

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(Mr. Mzumacharo, Malawi)

administrative infrastructure, on budgetary and human resources and on the socio-economic infrastructure (schools, hospitals, roads, bridges and water supplies). The Minister had appealed to the donor community to provide Malawi with assistance in those fields, essential for sustainable development. He reiterated that appeal, urging the donor community not to concern itself solely with the repatriation and rehabilitation of Mozambicans but also to give Malawi, the host country, the attention and assistance it so badly needed.

60. Ms. CAMARA (Côte d'Ivoire) said that, although it had been hoped that the 1990s would be the decade of voluntary repatriation and declining numbers of refugees, the last three years had seen the number rise considerably, from 15 to 18.9 million, among other reasons because new countries, such as those of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, had joined the ranks of those facing that problem.

61. Because of that, UNHCR was receiving more and more appeals for help. Its activities depended, however, on the generosity of the international community, which sometimes reacted selectively, showing more concern for neighbouring populations than those who were far off. For example, Africa, a continent which had 6 million refugees, in other words one third of the world's refugees, and 15 million displaced persons out of a total of 24 million throughout the world, had received less assistance in 1992 than the former Yugoslavia.

62. Her delegation believed that all countries affected by the problem should receive the same attention, and it would like an explanation of that mystery; perhaps it was a question of selective solidarity. The burden of the refugees fell primarily on the countries which took them in and, in the case of Africa, these countries were in a precarious economic and social situation; it was essential, therefore, for the international community to support UNHCR so that it could fulfil its commitments in Africa satisfactorily.

63. The problem could only be solved by tackling the basic causes of the refugee problem: regional conflicts, brought about by massive violations of human rights, economic, social, cultural and political, coups d'états and the various impediments to democracy, and, in the case of Africa, drought and other natural disasters. The international community had an obligation to establish an early warning system in order to prevent regional conflicts and, in the case of the drought, it should move from short-term assistance in emergency situations to long-term investment designed to achieve sustainable development.

64. It was universally agreed that voluntary repatriation to their region of origin was the only lasting solution to the problem of refugees and displaced persons. To that end, it was essential to provide them with minimum living conditions: lasting peace, work to ensure their subsistence, health and education services and, above all, security. In the case of Africa, fields must be cleared of mines before farming activity could resume.

65. To consolidate peace, the economic development of the affected regions must be promoted by close cooperation among the development agencies: UNICEF, UNDP, WFP, the regional banks, the international financial institutions and UNHCR.

(Ms. Camara, Côte d'Ivoire)

66. In conclusion, her delegation welcomed the return of refugees to their regions of origin that had taken place in southern Africa, Asia and Central America.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.